

[How Mrs. Redmond Came to Be]

No. 2

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SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

Life History

TITLE: HOW MRS. REDMOND CAME TO BE IN THE
APARTMENT HOUSE BUSINESS.

Date of First Writing December 8, 1938

Name of Person Interviewed Mrs. S. C. Schill (white)

Fictitious Name Mrs. Redmond

Street Address 49 Smith Street

Place Charleston, S.C.

Occupation Apartment House Keeper

Name of Writer Rose Workman

Name of Revisor State Office C. 10. S. C. Box. 2.

Project #-1655

Rose D. Workman

Charleston, S. C.

Approx. 2350 Words. HOW MRS. REDMOND CAME TO BE IN THE APARTMENT HOUSE BUSINESS, CHARLESTON, S. C.

Mrs. Redmond's glossy dark hair was simply coiled in a knot on her neck, and a black cord fell from her smart, new-fashioned glasses down upon the blouse of her crimson knitted suit. Her manner in greeting was gentle and quiet, while her capable looking hands with their long, spatulate fingers were busy with the knitting needles. Under them a crimson and black afghan was slowly increasing in size.

In her deep, calm voice, which somehow seemed the perfect counterpart of those strong, well-modeled hands, she said:

"You want to know how I came to be in the apartment house business?"

"Well, my husband is a railroad man. We came here from Florida sixteen years ago. But although I was born down there, my father was a native South Carolinian, and fought under Wade Hampton in the Reconstruction Days. (War Between the States.) When I was a child he used to tell me of a book that had been written about him and his brother, and named after the horse my father rode at that time. I found the book in a library once, and took it home and read it.

"He has often told me how Wade Hampton would say:

"Bill, protect the women and children.'

"Father was born in 1840, and after the war went down to Florida, where he made his living, hunting, fishing and trapping. The pillows I sleep on now are filled with the feathers from some of the 'plumaged birds' he killed then. He stayed down in the 2 Florida wilds for over forty years without ever coming back to Carolina. But he loved his native state and I

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often think how happy he would be to know that his daughter and grandchildren are living here today.

“So in the nation-wide strike of 1918, I believe it was, my husband came here to work as a car repairman at the railroad yard I brought my three little children and we settled down in a small apartment, rather crowded, but glad to be together.

“Moving round from one apartment to another, it seemed to us from the prices people wanted for them, they must be making plenty of money. If they could do it, why couldn't we?

“I sat down and thought things out. Here we were, paying out \$30 the first of every month, for three small furnished rooms, All right then. I would find an apartment unfurnished, for \$20, and put the other \$10 on some furniture. We'd make a start that way. So I found one, and paid down a month's rent in advance.

“But now I had given up the old furnished apartment, and had to move into the new one in the morning. And we didn't have even a bed to sleep on. What should we do for furniture?

“Never having borrowed any money before, I didn't realize just how to go about asking the bank for a loan. So I went to the grocer, to a former landlord, and a few other people whom I knew, and asked them for references. They wrote out little letters for me, and I took them to the bank, laid them down on the window and said: 3 “Will you let me have \$130, please, right away?”

“I know now how surprised the young man must have been, but he just said that these things took time and they would have to make investigations before advancing me any money; that it might take two or three weeks.

“I said, 'two or three weeks! I have to move tomorrow, and I haven't a bed to sleep on.'

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“So I walked out of the bank, and called on the grocer. I said to him:

'Will you lend me \$130 to furnish an apartment? I have to have it right away. I don't have a bed to sleep on even.'

“He just said: 'All right.'

“So I got the money, and went down town and paid out enough cash to furnish three rooms on the instalment plan.

My husband was then making \$125. I rented the front room for \$12. That left us a bed room, kitchen, and an attic upstairs for storage.

“Renting that front room was the beginning of our apartment house business.

“Soon the town was crowded. The Fleet was here. People couldn't find places to stay. Prices went up. Some one came in and asked for a room. We moved up to the attic and rented the bedroom for \$7 a week, with privileges of the kitchen. The children were small, and the bath room was big. We made closets in the bathroom and used it as a dressing room.

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“Soon the man in the front room moved out, and we rented that to another couple at a higher rent, with kitchen privileges, also. There we were, with three families all using the same kitchen. But we got along fine, and I started to have my two older children taught music.

“Then we decided to take a large place. We moved and have been there for nine years this coming March.

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"My husband's salary was soon cut to \$105. We were paying \$50 out of that \$105 for rent. We had seventeen rooms and furniture for three.

"One day my husband came in and said: 'People are sleeping on the floor. The hotels are crowded.'

"I rushed out and bought enough furniture to fix up the front room. My first tenants were two ladies, who paid me \$3 a night. My husband said:

"Why don't you send Jasper down to the hotels? They are turning off people.'

"Jasper was my boy. He was then about fourteen years old. He had a sweet little face, and though he was blind in one eye, it didn't hurt his looks any. And he had pretty, big white teeth.

"From then on, after Jasper had come from school in the afternoons, and got his lessons for the next day, he would make himself neat and go stand on the hotel steps. And when he heard people complaining that they couldn't find any place to go, he would put his head on one side in the cute way he had, and show those big, shining white teeth, and say:

'I can take you to a nice private home.'

"When they'd ask, 'Whose home?' He'd answer, 'My Mother's.'

"Then he'd get in the car and ride with them to the house.

"Sometimes when they got there, they wouldn't want to come in, because it looked so shabby outside, like lots of the old houses here, and he would say:

'If you would leave your wife in the car, and come inside, you'd see how nice and clean my mother keeps it.'

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“And lots of times they would come in, and when they did, they stayed.

“I remember lots of funny things about those first hard years. One thing I know — I never could have made it alone without my husbands' help.

“One time the town was so crowded I had every room in the house full. My husband and I didn't have any place to sleep. Someone had left an old broken wooden bedstead in an outhouse. We dragged it out and set it up. It was so hot we had to keep an electric fan going all the time to make that stuffy little place cool enough to stay in! And every night that old bed would fall down. One night the head would come down. The next night the foot. We laugh about it now!

“Our place, like lots of the old houses here, has servants' quarters out in the back, with stables under them.

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Well, another time when the town was crowded, I got some of my boy tenants to help me, and we floored the stable with boards from packing boxes. Then we mixed pink coloring with whitewash and tinted the walls, and my husband made tables and shelves and I covered them with green oilcloth, and the first thing I knew, I had rented the place to a young lady for \$20 a month.

“That same young lady left here and went to New York and won a Beauty Contest over two hundred girls; got a contract in Hollywood, and is playing now in 'Roman Scandals.'

“Twenty dollars a month wasn't so much for a furnished apartment, but sometimes in the Garden Season I got as much as \$5 a night for my rooms. Then we would make beds on the floor, and all sleep in the same room. But nobody minded. We were getting ahead!

“Often I would give the roomers breakfast and sometimes supper, too, besides cooking for my own family. Sometimes I would be in the kitchen for fourteen hours straight without

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laying down my head. All this time my health was terrible, but I kept on going. I hadn't time to stop.

"We didn't have linen enough to change the beds every day, so when the tourists would check out in the morning, my husband and I would strip the beds and drop the linen into a big tub in the back yard; dry the sheets, pillow cases and towels in the sun, or if there wasn't any sun, in the wind— and by one o'clock I'd have them ironed and back on the beds again.

"I had to cater to all kinds of persons. Sometimes rich 7 people would stop in; other times the plainest kind of folks. I only had simple things so they must always appear to the best advantage. And I kept my house CLEAN.

"I'm telling you all this to show you what people can do if they make up their minds to it. We had a hard time for awhile. During those years I had two abdominal operations; and my little girl had her tonsils out. All that cost us a lot of money but we didn't have to go to the city hospital, and we had private rooms and nurses and everything.

"I'd like to tell you how my little girl helped me to rent my rooms in those first struggling years.

"One afternoon I had to go out. It was in the middle of the Garden Season, and I told her if anyone came, to ask them \$5 a night for the room that was vacant, but if they held out against paying that much, to let it go for \$4. When I came home, I saw a big Pierce-Arrow in the yard, and two good-looking young men taking out baggage. One of them called out to me:

'Say, your little daughter is a clever kid. Know what she told us? She said:

'Ma says the room is \$5, but if that is too much, take it for \$4. We took it for \$4.'

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"Today that little girl is thirteen years of age; my son had a good job, making \$125 a month; my oldest daughter is making \$65; my husband is still earning only \$125, but the house averages me about \$160 a month.

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"Now I have a good servant and I don't have to do any hard work. We have all the comforts anyone could wish for, and have electric iceboxes in each apartment; three radios, extension phones. Our own apartment consists of three bedrooms, kitchen, bath, dining and living room.

"We have our own car and enjoy taking long drives on Sunday afternoons, and making trips back home to see my husbands' people in Florida sometimes. We're going down next Friday, instead of at Christmas, as he doesn't like to be away from home then.

"Today I don't owe anybody a five-cent piece. We save between \$50 and \$75 a month. Some seasons I've made as much as \$500 in eight weeks, and I've never lost one month's rent in the twelve years I've been in apartments."